U. S. Defector to Reds Turned to Marx at 15

By PRISCILLA JOHNSON
North American Newspaper Alliance

MOSCOW, Nov. 26.—"For two years now I have been waiting to do this one thing: To dissolve my American citizenship and become a citizen of the Soviet Union." Today 20-year-old Lee Harvey Oswald of Fort Worth, Tex., is in Moscow. He hopes he's close to his goal.

With his suit of charcoal gray flannel, dark tie and tan cashmere sweater, Lee looks every bit like Joe College. His life hasn't been that of a typical college boy, however.

His father, an insurance salesman, died before Lee was born. Reared in Texas and Louisiana, the boy spent two years in New York during his early teens. At 17 he enlisted in the Marines.

"I did it because we were poor and I didn't want to be a burden on my mother," he says. Later he spent 14 months as a licensed radar operator in the Far East.

Vows He Won't Return

In September, his three-year hitch nearly over, Lee was given a dependency discharge from the Marines. The next month he arrived in Moscow to petition the Supreme Soviet, highest legislative body in the USSR, for Soviet citizenship. Living in Moscow's Hotel Metropole on money he earned as a United States Marine, Lee Oswald waits for an answer.

Even though Russian officials have warned him Soviet citizenship is not easy to obtain, Lee already refers to the Soviet government as "my government."

"But even if I'm not accepted, on no account will I go back to the United States," Lee says. "I shall remain here, if necessary, as a resident alien." The only thing Soviet officials now promise is that Lee can stay on in Russia regardless of whether he becomes a citizen.

Meanwhile, they're "investigating" the possibility of sending him to a Soviet higher technical instotute.

Found Answer in Marx

What brought this serious, soft-spoken southern boy to Moscow? Evidently, it's a combination of poverty, what he considers the plight of United States Negroes, and the United States Marines.

"My mother has been a worker all her life," Lee says. "She's a good example of what happens to workers in the United States." He declines to elaborate.

"At the age of 15," he adds, "after watching the way workers are treated in New York, and Negroes in the South, I was looking for a key to my environment. Then I discovered socialist literature."

Lee was struck, in particular, by Marx's "Das Kapital." He concluded that, as an American, "I would become either a worker exploited for capitalist profit, or an exploiter or, since there are many in this category, I'd be one of the unemployed."

Lee became a Marxist. Later, as a Marine Corps private in Japan and the Philippines, he "had a chance to watch American militarist imperialism in action."

A year ago, Lee began getting ready to come to Russia. Using a Berlitz grammar, he taught himself to read and write Russian. Never, says Lee, a nice-looking six-footer with gray eyes and brown hair, did he consider deserting the Marine Corps.

Neither Side Hasty

Does it occur to Lee that Soviet officials may be embarrassed by his effort to become a citizen of their country at a moment when Russia is cultivating good relations with the United States?

Russian officials, says Lee, "don't encourage and don't discourage me." They warn, however, that neither Lee's wish, nor theirs, will determine whether his citizenship application is accepted. They have offered Lee only the sanctuary of a prolonged stay in the USSR.

As for officials at the United States Embassy in Moscow, they are torn between their desire to give Lee time to think it over, and their legal obligation to hear his oath renouncing American citizenship if he insists.

Lee is bitter at United States Consul Richard Snyder, who, he charges, stalled him when he asked to take the oath on October 31, the only time Lee has been at the Embassy. As a result, Lee won't go back there.

Two Other Cases

Embassy officials admit they are a bit gunshy. This is their third case of attempted defection this fall. The first, Nicholas Petrulli, 38, of Valley Stream, L. I., changed his mind about defecting just before Russia refused him citizenship. Petrulli, a sheet-metal worker, had a history of mental illness.

The second, Robert Edward Webster, 30, of Cleveland, an employe of the Rand Development Corp., asked for, and received, Soviet citizenship after he had spent the summer working at the United States fair in Moscow's Sokolniki Park. Both Webster and Petrulli had marital troubles back home.

Unlike Webster and Petrulli, Lee Oswald has never been married. His age—he just turned 20 on October 18—is apparently no bar to renouncing his American citizenship. Russians come of age at 18.

As for the ordinary Russians he meets, do they seem surprised by Lee's desire to defect?

"Well," says Lee, "they're very curious and they ask me why." Materialist Muscovites, he adds, "understand when I speak of the idealistic reasons that brought me here. They ask me many questions about the material conditions of workers in the United States."

Regardless of any "material shortcomings" he sees while he's here, Lee insists he will never go back to the United States. "Emigration," he says, "isn't easy. I don't recommend it to everyone. It means coming to a new country, always being the outsider, always having to adjust. But to me, my reasons are strong and good. I believe I'm doing right."

That's why Lee won't take any calls when his mother telephones from Fort Worth to beg him not to defect.

LEE HARVEY OSWALD
—AP Photo

AFC, INACTIVE MAR
CORPS RESERVE,
SN 165 3236

31-813

5

33-26125